



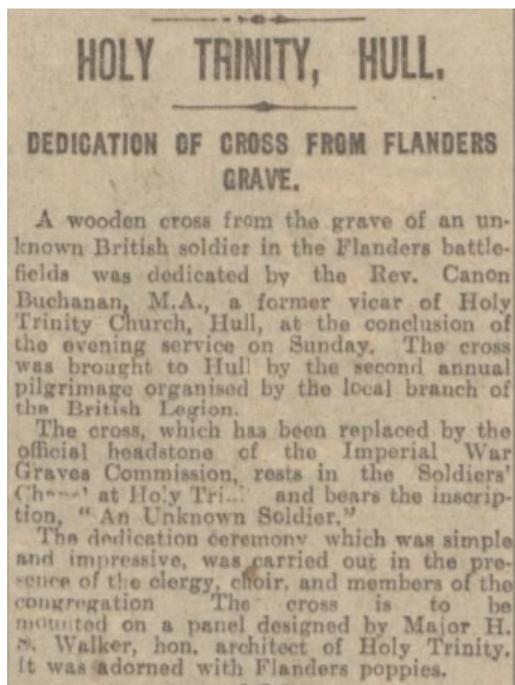
Hull Minster's Wooden Battlefield Cross

Hull Minster's World War One wooden battlefield cross is fixed to a pillar at the east end of the church. At the base of the cross there is evidence of 'rot' where the marker was fixed in the ground to mark a soldier's grave. A metal disc on the cross tells us it marked the grave of an 'Unknown British Soldier'. How did this cross come to be in the church?

At the end of World War One the Western Front battlefields were strewn with small cemeteries created as a result of fighting and battles that led to the loss of thousands of soldiers' lives. Often these cemeteries were small, holding just a few graves, marked by the temporary wooden crosses used during the war. The job of

consolidating the graves into the formal war grave cemeteries was undertaken by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. Their work after the war created the cemeteries characterised by the neat lines of white headstones we see today.

During the work creating these formal memorial cemeteries, where the identity of the person marked by the temporary wooden cross was known, the family was offered the old cross to keep as a memorial; the family were responsible for shipping the cross back home. Where the identity of the soldier was not known, or the family did not want the cross, those wooden crosses were burned and the ashes scattered on the cemeteries. Hull Minster's wooden cross was almost certainly one of the crosses that was carried back to Hull from the former battlefields during this period of cemetery consolidation.



A report in the Hull Daily Mail of 10th October 1927 reports there was a service of dedication in Holy Trinity Church for the wooden cross at the end of the Harvest Festival service the previous Sunday. The article goes on to say that the cross was brought back to Hull by the local British Legion branch on their second annual visit to the battlefields. Using these details it is possible to search the British Newspaper Archive and discover when and where this British Legion visit occurred.

1927 is a significant year in the development of the war grave cemeteries on the western front. On Sunday, 24 July 1927 the ceremony unveiling the Menin Gate at Ypres was held. Intended to be

a place of memorial for those British and Commonwealth soldiers who have no known grave, thousands of people made the journey to see the Menin Gate formally unveiled. Included in the ceremonial party was the King of the Belgians and Field Marshall Lord Plummer, who told those members of the crowd who had relatives named on the Gate: *"He is not missing. He is here."*

From a Hull Daily Mail report we know that the Hull British Legion visit was made to Belgium and France just before the official unveiling ceremony of the Menin Gate in July. Reports of the visit say that they went to see the Menin Gate only a few days before the official ceremony and had been offered the opportunity to have tickets to the event. The group had declined the offer, stating that they felt it might be too much for some members of the group. Perhaps their visit had already proved arduous as the report of their trip states that during the time in France and Belgium they visited sixty cemeteries.

Sixty cemeteries seems a lot but it needs to be remembered that the consolidation process was still ongoing and some of the places they visited may still have been the original temporary battlefield graves. Also worth considering is that many of those making the trip would themselves have fought in these places and have first-hand knowledge of where individuals had been buried. Sadly, some may have been involved in burials of comrades who had been killed. It is conceivable that as they travelled around the battlefield cemeteries, seeing the changes occurring and the replacement of the wooden crosses, they decided to return home with one marked to an unknown British soldier. Such a cross could itself act as a focus in the city for those people in Hull who had no known grave to visit on the battlefields.

In the Hull Daily Mail report there are no details of which area of the front the cross came from. Again, this may have been a deliberate intention by the British Legion group in 1927. By giving no details of where it was from, anyone visiting Holy Trinity Church to remember at the wooden cross was helped to focus on their own loved ones by the anonymity of this particular cross.

Hull Minster's wooden cross was not the only one brought back from the western battlefields to Hull. An article in the Hull Daily Mail of 24 October 1927 states that eight wooden crosses were brought back. One was dedicated in Holy Trinity Church; another in St Michael's and All Angels, Sutton Ings; a third was intended for St Charles Roman Catholic Church; a fourth for the Methodist Queen's Hall; and a fifth in the Hull British Legion headquarters. The whereabouts of the other three are not stated. How many of these crosses survive? Certainly the one in Hull Minster has withstood the passing of time and gives us the opportunity to use it as a focus for our remembrance of all soldiers who have no known grave.